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*In thy green lap was Nature's Darling laid,
What time, where fadid, Aon strayed.*



*This pencil take (she said) —
Thine too these golden keys, immortal boy;
This can unlock the gates of joy
Of horror that, and shrilling fears,
Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic tears.*

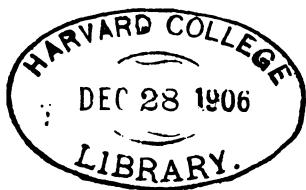
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REMARKS
ON
THE MORAL INFLUENCE
OF
Shakspeare's Plays; //
WITH
ILLUSTRATIONS FROM HAMLET.

BY
THE REV. THOMAS GRINFIELD, M.A.
—
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J. E. Chase

REMARKS ON THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF SHAKSPEARE'S PLAYS.

THE splendour of SHAKSPEARE's genius, combined with the fascination of dramatic compositions, has made him, of all existing writers, the most extensively and permanently popular favourite among English readers of every description. As a painter of human characters and passions, developed in circumstances the most varied and interesting, he is acknowledged to have surpassed all his rivals, ancient or modern. So marvellous a genius, exerted in a sphere of such extended interest, possesses an undisputed claim on our attention and sympathy;—a claim founded on the sentiment that awakened a burst of applause in a Roman Theatre, “*Homo sum; Humani nihil à me alienum puto*;”—“Human myself, nothing human can fail to interest me.” Our participation of humanity is sufficient to insure our subjection to Shakspeare's power over human hearts.

It becomes, then, a matter of serious importance that a writer, so popular and so powerful, should be turned to our profit; that we should read him with a wise and discerning spirit, and derive the benefit, moral and intellectual, which his masterly paintings of mankind are fitted to impart.

Some, I am aware, among those who are swayed by religious sentiments, will be disposed to smile at the mention of moral benefit, to be derived from a writer, considerably open to moral censure. It may be justly demanded that those who profess to *condemn* the reading of Shakspeare, should first have duly and intelligently studied him *themselves*, and then have *ceased* to read a writer whom they would fain prohibit *others* from enjoying. Otherwise, they are either incompetently ignorant, or hypocritically inconsistent: such accusers have no

title to be heard. It is only the class of those who, having studied and appreciated Shakspeare, honestly disapprove and discard him as morally injurious, to whom a reply is due.

The fact, that persons of the most estimable, the most religious character, who may happen to possess a cultivated literary taste, are always found among the students and admirers of Shakspeare, is itself a demonstration that he cannot be justly regarded as a morally injurious writer.

Most unfortunately, we have lost his personal biography; his Life is as remarkably obscure, as his name and his genius are renowned; but could we the tale unfold, it would probably turn to the credit of his moral character. Thus much is ascertained: he settled early in wedded and domestic life; he produced 36 Plays within 26 years of a life that included only 52 years, thus proving his industrious and sober habits; he retired on his fortune, which he had thus nobly earned, for the last ten years of his life; his companions represent him as a "man of sweet and gentle manners; worthy and beloved; of an honest, open, and free nature; and of a smooth and pleasant wit."

In justice to our great dramatist, it should be understood, and remembered by his readers, that he is professedly an all-comprehensive delineator of men and manners; an honest, impartial, universal exhibiter of our species, in all its aspects and varieties, its low buffoonery, as well as its graceful refinement; its wild, and strange, and horrible excesses, as well as its just, its tender, or its exalted sentiments. With Othello, he says, "*I will a round, unvarnish'd tale deliver.*" As he moved among mankind, he looked on all with an equal eye, he painted all with equal care and skill. Michael Angelo was accustomed to say, that painters were called to represent men and women, "not as they *are*, but as they ought to be." Shakspeare may be said to have reversed this rule of Buonarotti, and delineated human beings, "not as they ought to be, but as they *are*." And, as the world, the field of his observation, abounds in folly, vice, and crime, at least as much as in examples of wisdom or virtue; he exhibits characters of the former class to an extent (let it be confessed) quite as large as we might desire or approve,

yet not *too* large for our actual acquaintance with mankind ; while in the felicitous language of Coleridge, one of the purest and finest among the myriads of our Poet's critical admirers, "Shakspeare has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice ; he never renders *that* amiable, which Religion and Reason alike teach us to detest. If he occasionally disgusts a keen sense of delicacy, he never injures the mind ; he does not use the faulty thing with a faulty purpose ; with him, vice never walks in twilight."

By some I have heard it urged as an objection to the reading of Shakspeare, that it will generate a pernicious taste for the reading of Plays, as inferior to his in purity, as in power :—in reply to this objection, I can only say that it contradicts my own experience, and, I believe, that of all the most earnest admirers of Shakspeare ; his immense superiority disrelishes us for all Plays but his own.

It has been the fashion with the critics, to eulogise, with special admiration, the *comic* scenes : even the sage and solemn Johnson appears to have preferred them to the serious and *tragic* parts. To such a preference I cannot subscribe. Perfect as the genius of Shakspeare shows itself, whenever it revels in scenes of vulgar merriment, I cannot but regret that he has indulged it, in such scenes, to so great an extent ; most gladly would I have exchanged a large proportion of his comic pages, for a corresponding accession to those wise, or solemn, those elegant, or pathetic passages, which compose the only pure and precious gems of his inexhaustible mine. Those Plays are surely the most excellent and admirable, in which serious thought and feeling predominate most over trifling mirth, however brilliant ; witness the magnificent instance of Hamlet, the most predominantly serious of all his Tragedies. For the coarse or profane irregularities, which so often encounter us in his comic dialogue, and unfit it for social reading, I am at a loss for any better apology than this : we must pass them by as faithful, and only *too* faithful delineations of human life, in its ruder, baser forms ; just as in the living world, in the noisy tavern, or even in the public street, we are condemned, at

times, to hear language expressive of similar depravity. Besides which, it is evident, that in his wildest scenes of reckless folly, the Poet himself has no more an *evil* design upon our moral sentiments, than has the satirical manners-painting Hogarth, in his pictures of the Harlot's Progress and Marriage à la Mode. There is a certain manly, healthy, and fearless hardihood, as opposed to an effeminate, sickly, nervous sensitiveness of moral feeling, which is far better suited than the latter to the rude atmosphere of "this working-day world," and quite as nearly allied to sincerity and virtue. Our plain-speaking Poet, is certainly; a formidable foe to all sorts of modern pretension of moral pedantry, and prudence. The very openness and coarseness of these coarse passages, brings its own antidote: it is *vice without disguise*: there is nothing *insidious*, nothing meretricious; no serpent under the rose; no poison dipt in honey; as in the smooth amatory minstrels and novelists of later times. People talk of the vulgarity that sullies Shakspeare's pages, and too many seem to find their most congenial favourites among his Falstaffs and his Bardolps; but where beside shall we find such exquisite specimens of refined courtesy and elegant conversation,—such refined models of tenderness and grace, of politeness and nobility, for the study and envy of our ladies and gentlemen, our courtiers, and our Princes?

But, while I vainly wish that he had been less profuse of vulgarity, and more observant of decorum, in his mirthful scenes, "take him for all in all," with fair allowance for the manners of his times, as well as for the comprehensiveness of his design, he has never appeared to me a pernicious or dangerous writer. The *only* danger attendant on the study of Shakspeare, arises (in my opinion) from *another* quarter; his unequalled beauty, his irresistible fascination, which puts us in danger of what an eccentric writer of our day has glowingly portrayed as *Hero Worship*; idolatry of Genius; a serious danger, *this*, and the only one against which I think it needful to caution the student of Shakspeare. In respect to sentiments of the highest importance, the great truths of Religion, how

much more worthy to be trusted, than those theorists who deny our native depravity, and the Divine atonement,—he who, alike sagacious and unflattering, tells us, that apart from a better influence, “ All’s oblique ; there’s nothing level in our cursed nature, but direct villainy :”—he who bids us cry for mercy to Him, “ who when all our souls were forfeit, found out the remedy.”

Let it be understood that I speak of him merely as a *writer*, to be read at our homes in hours of social or solitary leisure, apart from the accompaniments of *theatrical* representation. And, in truth, although his genius is the most strikingly *dramatic* that has ever appeared, and his scenes the most varied and stirring that were ever prepared for action ; none (I am persuaded) did ever so fully appreciate, and enjoy the beauty of Shakspeare, as those who have perused and re-perused him in meditative silence, or in the domestic circle ; “ while imagination,” better than any corporal actor, “ bodied forth the form of things unknown ;” as Campbell paints his lovely Gertrude wandering forth into the woods of Wyoming ; and while she sits in a bowery recess,

“ That volume on her lap is thrown,
Which every heart of human mould endears ;
With Shakspeare’s self she thinks and speaks alone,
And no intruding visitation fears,
To shame the unconscious laugh, or stop her sweetest tears.”

The tasteful and philosophic Dugald Stewart has justly remarked, that “ When a person, accustomed to dramatic reading, sees for the first time, one of his favourite characters represented on the stage, he is generally dissatisfied with the exhibition. For my own part, (continues Stewart) I have never received from any Falstaff on the stage, half the pleasure which Shakspeare gives me in the closet. It is not always that the actor fails ; he disappoints us by exhibiting something different from what our imagination had anticipated, and which consequently appears to us at the moment an unfaithful representation of the Poet’s idea.”

Theatrical influence excluded, it must surely be our own fault, rather than Shakspeare's, if we are the worse,—if we are not, in some respect, the better, for an occasional and attentive perusal of his more important compositions. For who that is versed in his pages, needs to be told what a treasury they disclose, of noble sentiment, of acute observation, of sage advice ;—what a world of practical truth, and moral wisdom, may be explored through his ever-changing scenes of pleasantry or pathos ? His plays, as Johnson has remarked, are “replete with practical axioms, and domestic wisdom.” Of him, in the larger part, even of his comic scenes, may be said, as is elegantly said by Zenophon of Socrates : *παιζει αμα σπουδαζειν.* “ He sports with a serious purpose.”

Shakspeare, indeed, is quite as remarkable for his *moral wisdom*, as for his poetic beauty and his dramatic power. This is abundantly seen in the more serious scenes of his tragedy ; but it is not confined to these. He is doubtless at once the merriest and the wisest of *laughing* philosophers. It is interesting to observe how many scraps and snatches of instructive reflection meet us in the midst of his wildest comic scenes. Everywhere, among the luxuriant flowers and rampant weeds, his earnest explorer will discover wholesome and nutritious fruits —and these the more agreeable from their contrasted situation and unexpected occurrence. Take the following, as a random specimen, from the dialogue between Hamlet and Polonius, relative to the Players :—

“ *Hamlet.* Good my lord, will you see the Players well bestowed ? Let them be well used.

“ *Polonius.* My lord, I will use them according to their desert.

“ *Hamlet.* Odd's bodikin, man, much better. Use any man after his desert, and who shall escape whipping ? Use them after your own honour and dignity. *The less they deserve, the more merit in your bounty.*”

Act II., Scene 2.

Now, in the sprightliness and haste of the dialogue, this reply of Hamlet may escape many a reader or listener, without a pause for reflection. Yet here is carelessly thrown in our way a

pearl of generous and noble sentiment, worthy to be treasured in our minds, and worn in our social converse. Here is virtually the divine lesson of Charity, which, instead of dwelling upon the failings and demerits of others, lets the rain of its favours fall even on the undeserving and ungrateful, deems it "more blessed to give than to receive," loves even an enemy, and "overcomes evil with good." Not content with mere forbearance towards those whose faults merited harshness, the gentle and magnanimous Prince, in whom we may recognise the Poet himself personified, recommends us to show that heroic prodigality of nature, ambition of excellence, which says, "The less their merit, the more merit in bounty to them." So truly may the Great Dramatist be said to moralize amidst his mirthment, and preach amidst his playfulness. But while instruction *tinctures* his gaiety, it *pervades* his seriousness. In a memoir of the late Rev. Robert Anderson, of Brighton, highly revered for his piety and usefulness, it is noted, that to the end of his life, he delighted in finding passages of Shakespeare that witnessed to the glory of God.

Nothing more easy than from his pages to compile a book of shrewd remarks, and valuable sentences, enforced on memory by the most original, picturesque, and energetic expressions; a refreshing contrast to the "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable iterations of modern common-place." And, while he surrounds us with all sorts of speakers, and sentiments, it is to be understood, as a thing of course, that he *means* only his wise and virtuous meanings.* Amidst "the busy hum" of voices, his own is

* After all that has been written on this great favourite of Nature, I cannot pretend to place another wreath upon his brow. On no individual genius has criticism or panegyric so completely exhausted its powers. If the noble Preface of Johnson be deficient in that strain of enraptured admiration which a more poetical mind would indulge, the deficiency has been splendidly supplied by an article by Jeffery, in the *Edinburgh Review*, on Hazlitt's Characters of Shakspeare. I cannot but think those excellent people mistaken, who regard our Great Dramatist as a pernicious writer, calculated to corrupt the principles and inflame the passions. He shows the world as he saw it, with all its light and darkness, its good and evil characters and actions, like an honest, impartial, all-observing,

to be heard ever and anon uttering sentiments "of a higher mood," in loftier language than the rest. How evidently is he in *earnest*, and with what a tone of sweet or solemn eloquence does he speak,—whenever, in his onward career he pauses for a few moments, and without effort or design, upon some *serious*, perhaps even upon some sacred theme! Never does he deliver himself so masterly, as when some high and holy thought calls forth his conscience, and his heart. It were easier to begin, than to end, a series of illustrative quotations: they gild his pages, thick, and bright, and irregularly scattered, as the stars of heaven. In *Hamlet* and *Lear*, they cluster and sparkle like constellations. Who can doubt, for instance, that Shakspeare looked into the depth of his ample mind, and drew up thence those gems of bright reflection, which he presents in the famed soliloquy, in which Hamlet, yearning after escape from life, restrains himself from the act of suicide, by the apprehension of "something after death?" Who can forget how finely poor old Lear preaches to the raging elements, and makes them preach to the reader? What a memento of duty, those words of the storm-beaten King:—

" Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
 How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,
 Your loop'd and window'd ragg'deness, defend you
 From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
 Too little care of this! Take physic, Pomp;
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel;
 That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,
 And show the heavens more just!"

In "Measure for Measure," one of the most deep-thoughted, and heart-exploring dramas, I cannot but recollect

and all-recording spectator: "nothing he extenuates, nor sets down aught in malice." Whatever is wicked in his pages appears to be written in his dramatic character, not *con amore*: it is chiefly in his noblest sentiments (and these are numberless) that he speaks in his own person. He does not breathe the malignity of a Byron, or the licentiousness of a Moore.

and produce those pious and pathetic lines, from the dialogue between Isabel and Duke Angelo :—

“ Alas ! alas !

• Why all the souls that are, were forfeit once ;
 And He that might the vantage best have took,
 Found out the remedy. How would *you* be,
 If He, that is the top of judgment, should
 But judge *you* as *you* are ? O think on that ;
 And mercy *then* will breathe within your lips,
 Like man new-made.—Merciful Heaven !
 Thou rather, with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt,
 Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
 Than the soft myrtle ! Oh, but man, proud man,
 Drest in a little brief authority,
 Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
 As make the angels weep !”

But I dare not indulge in selected passages ; which, after all, would be only (as Johnson has represented it) like producing a few stones, as specimens of some noble edifice, to which they belonged. Having once more mentioned Johnson, let me warmly commend the perusal of his Preface, which may be pronounced one of the most finished, and most majestic compositions in the literature of English prose,—and which eloquently attests how highly the *moral* Sage appreciated the *moral*, as well as the dramatic, merit of this mighty Poet.

So variously admirable are the Plays of Shakspeare, that while it is not difficult to discriminate the characteristic excellence of *each*, it is not easy to arrange several of the more eminent pieces in the order of merit, or assign to each its appropriate place, on grounds on which the majority of his admirers would coincide. To circumscribe the competition within its narrowest compass ; we may select the four tragedies, Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth, Othello, as four rivals of acknowledged preëminence.* Of these, each has its own especial votaries.

* The Dramas of Shakspeare, which have usually been distinguished as Comedies, Histories, or Tragedies, may, I think, be more naturally distributed into two classes, as either *Romantic* or *Historic* ; the one class, in some pieces, so blended

Campbell awards the palm to Macbeth ; Hazlitt to Lear ; Johnson to Othello ;—were the votes of any mixed assembly to be taken, the majority would, in all probability, be found in favour of Macbeth. Its hurry and its horror render it more rapid, and more mighty, in its effect on the multitude, than the comparatively calm and pensive Hamlet. It is indeed a stupendous Tragedy ! For myself, after several oscillations of preference, during the perusals of past years, I am disposed to acquiesce finally in the opinion of those, who with Goëthe, Schlegel, and Coleridge, find their favourite in the Prince of Denmark.

The commanding superiority of these four Tragedies, arises principally from this, that each contains a prolonged, and powerful exhibition of one master passion, as embodied in the leading personage : the tyranny of self-destroying ambition, and the tremendous acceleration of guilt, in Macbeth ; the agonies of parental sensibility to filial ingratitude, in Lear ; in Othello, the dreadful effects of conjugal jealousy ; while Hamlet, a character less strongly defined, more complex, and profound than any of the others, develops the working of a mind, lofty in contemplation, but listless in action ; a fine, but an irresolute, and melancholy spirit ; keenly sensitive to the touches of conscience, and the calls of duty, but dilatory and vacillating in performance. Hazlitt thus discriminates these four unrivalled dramas ; Macbeth stands foremost in wildness of imagination, and rapidity of action ; Lear, in intensity of pathos ; Othello, in progressive interest of one mighty feeling ; Hamlet, in the refined developement of thought and sentiment.

with the other, that they may be termed *historically-romantic* Dramas. To the reader of deep poetic sensibility, the least interesting class is that of the purely historic plays. Of the blended class are those most splendid and celebrated of his productions,—Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear, and Othello. But the most beautiful and delightful passages, those to which we most naturally recur as our congenial favourites, are to be found, I think, in the purely romantic Dramas : such as *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, &c. These contain passages which for tender sweetness or picturesque beauty, we should reluctantly exchange for those dazzling coruscations of genius which irradiate the dramas of a more heroic and ambitious character.

In each of these great tragedies, the *moral* lesson is not *less* prominently or powerfully displayed, than the central personage, in whom it is embodied ; and thus the moral interest is essentially interwoven and commensurate with the dramatic. To thousands, who would listen to no professional preacher, how effectively has Macbeth presented the torments and the horrors of a conscience foul with blood ! Who shall say how many a “thought, whose murder *yet* was but fantastical,” may have been appalled and expelled by the ghost of Banquo, shaking his gory locks at his murderer, amidst the banquet ? Has the odiousness of filial ingratitude ever been painted with such dreadful power to the view of our daughters, as in the marble-hearted, wolf-eyed, and detested Goneril and Regan ? Can the malignity, meanness, mischief, of slander, or the defamation of a virtuous character,—(one of the most pestilent evils that can poison the peace of domestic life, and social intercourse,) be placed in a stronger light than in the viper-like, fiend-like Iago ? Budgell, the unfortunate friend of Addison, affected to justify his act of suicide, by a posthumous appeal to Cato’s soliloquy ; who can say that the suicidal purpose has never been turned aside by the awful soliloquy of Hamlet ?

In the conduct of the story, Hamlet is strikingly contrasted with Macbeth. In the last, there is a continual urgency and precipitation of events toward the crisis and climax of the horrors :—in Hamlet, all is indecision and delay. This contrast, as I remember, was vividly illustrated by Coleridge, in a Lecture, (the only one I had the felicity of hearing from his lips,) delivered at the White Lion Inn, Bristol, at the close of 1813. In the notes of that Lecture, as published among his “Literary Remains,” I find his own words : “The tragedy of Hamlet proceeds with the utmost slowness ; that of Macbeth with a breathless and crowded rapidity.” Not less striking is the contrast between these two unrivalled tragedies, in respect to the general character of their contents : Macbeth being marked by horror in action ; Hamlet by solemnity in sentiment.

Among the Plays of Shakspeare, HAMLET is distinguished as that one in which he most largely displays his acquaintance

with the deepest feelings of our nature, the mysterious mazes of our minds, as discovered in circumstances of overwhelming calamity; when reason trembles on the verge of madness, and melancholy darkens to despair! In no other tragedy is Shakspeare so meditative, so metaphysical, so spiritual, so religious. Less brilliant in action than Macbeth; less thrilling in passion than Lear,—Hamlet is more profound in thought, more eloquent in language, than all. It is signalized by immense power of mind and utterance; it certainly stands among the most perfect, if not itself the most perfect, of Shakspeare's compositions. Its high-wrought excellence, is the more remarkable, as it is classed among the earliest of his dramatic works, and appears to have been produced soon after he had attained his thirtieth year, not less than twenty years before his somewhat early death. Steevens discovered an autograph of Dr. Gabriel Harvey, in his copy of Chaucer, dated 1598, (when Shakspeare was 34,) mentioning the tragedy of Hamlet, as *then* already well known, and greatly admired by the "wiser sort." It was not, however, printed until 1603. Coleridge, judging by internal evidence alone, places Hamlet among the four latest productions of Shakspeare.

Hamlet himself may be regarded as one of the most original, ingenious, and profoundly interesting, of Shakspeare's manly characters: a bright conception, which, embodied in "answerable style," does the highest honour to his genius and his heart. The character of Hamlet, on account of its complexity, and its contrarieties, has been commonly represented as somewhat mysterious and inexplicable. Such it *is*; such is every original, imaginative, and elevated mind. On this account it is, that Hamlet, and every similarly-gifted spirit, must ever be pre-eminently interesting. Shakspeare has probably breathed more of himself into his Hamlet than into any other of his dramatic persons:—a cast of mind, at once philosophic and poetic; at once serious and mirthful; at once affectionate and brave; at once acutely observant of others, and profoundly reflective on self; instinct with noble sentiments, solemn convictions, immortal expectations.

Shakspeare in general, appears, as he was felicitously called by Coleridge, in the Lecture to which I have adverted, "a myriad-minded man :" he seems to forget himself, to merge his own individuality, in the varied characters of universal humanity : a perfect antithesis to Byron, who evidently remembers and reflects himself in all his poetic heroes. It may be, that, in the thoughtful Prince of Denmark, we overhear more of Shakspeare's inner man, his secret and serious cogitations and impressions, than in any other instance of his manifold creations.

Hamlet has by many been supposed mad : this I must suppose a mad supposition, contradicted by his own words, where, speaking in confidence to his friend Horatio, he says—

" How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself ;
As I perchance, hereafter shall think meet
To put an antick disposition on."

Act I., Scene 5.

And again, where, in his remonstrance with his mother, the Queen, he remarks—

" _____ Let not the bloated king
Make you to ravel all this matter out,
That I, essentially, am *not* in madness,
But mad in craft."

Act III., Scene 4.

" Hamlet, (as Schlegel observes,) acts the part of madness with inimitable superiority." In order to account for his behaviour, we must bear in mind, beside his artful assumption of strangeness, the strange and awful circumstances under which he comes before us, from his first appearance in the opening scene; than which there is not another so solemnly impressive in all the tragedies of Shakspeare. It is a scene worthy to have been selected by himself, as the *only* one (excepting Adam, in "*As You Like It,*") which he honoured with his presence as an actor. When was there ever *such* a spectacle on the stage, as the kingly ghost *so* personified? Who beside could so powerfully represent the majestic and unearthly visitor?

But what a strangeness of soul,—what a sickness and deadness to the world, must have been left upon the mind of the noble-hearted Prince, by the vision and audience of his murdered father's apparition ! In Hamlet we behold a being, rich in ideal wisdom,—deficient in active energy ; haunted by the sense of guilt, in his own non-performance of what he deemed a sacred duty, to which he had been summoned by a voice from the dead ; blighted in his prospect of life ; disappointed in his love ; restrained from self-destruction, only by his conscience ; made the more unhappy by his “large discourse, looking before and after,” his “capability and godlike reason”—by the contrast of his lofty apprehensions and aspirations, with his remorseful feelings, and disconsolate circumstances ; the contrast of musings bright and warm, with actions faint and cold ! —a character too often realized, too easily found ;—an example which illustrates the wretchedness of those, who in the midst of glorious contemplations, bring nothing to effect ! Viewed in this aspect, Hamlet may read an important and instructive lecture to us all. “Hamlet,” as Coleridge observes, “brave as he is, vacillates from sensibility, procrastinates from over-thought, and loses the power of *action*, in the energy of *resolve*.”

Those who would study the character of Hamlet, may be referred to the simple and beautiful analysis given by Coleridge, in his “Literary Remains ;” to the ingenious observations of Goëthe, in his eccentric story of “Wilhelm Meister ;” and to those of Schlegel : all amusingly varying from each other, and all contributing to compose the complete exposition of the mystery. None of these had I seen when I penned the preceding remarks. It is a striking proof of the marvellous depth of Shakspeare's inspired and intuitive mind, as well as of the singular excellence of this Tragedy, that these metaphysical analysts have exerted all their acumen on the decomposition of Hamlet's equally intricate and interesting, equally strange and just character ;—which itself presents a fine illustration of those wise words of his own :

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dream'd of in your philosophy.”

Goëthe thus comments :—“ When the ghost has vanished, Hamlet utters the expressive ejaculation :

“The time is out of joint : O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right !”

in which words, I imagine (says Goëthe) may be found the key to Hamlet’s whole procedure. To me, (he adds) it is clear that Shakspeare meant, in this instance, to represent the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for its performance. In a costly jar, that should have borne only pleasant flowers in its bosom, there is an oak tree planted : the roots expand, the jar is shivered. A lovely, pure, and noble nature, without the strength of nerve that forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear, and must not cast away. All duties are holy to him : the present is too hard. He winds, and turns, and torments himself: he advances and recoils : he is ever put in mind, ever puts himself in mind : at last, does all but lose his purpose from his thoughts, yet without recovering his peace of mind.”

Coleridge has these fine remarks :—“ One of Shakspeare’s modes of creating characters, is to conceive any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid deficiency or excess, and then to place it, thus mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances. In Hamlet, he seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our *senses*, and our meditation on the workings of our *minds*. In Hamlet, this balance is disturbed : we see a great, an almost enormous intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompaniments. This character Shakspeare places in circumstances, under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment. The effect of this over-balance of the imaginative power, is beautifully illustrated in the everlasting broodings, and superfluous activities of Hamlet’s mind, which, unseated from its healthy condition, is constantly occupied with the world *within*, and abstracted from the world *without*,—

giving substance to shadows, and throwing a mist over all common-place realities."

"Hamlet," says Schlegel, "is single in its kind; a tragedy of *thought*, inspired by continual and never-satisfied meditation on human destiny, and the dark perplexity of the events of this world. Much has been said, much written, on this enigmatical work; and yet no thinker, who anew expresses himself on it, will entirely coincide with his predecessors, in his view of the connection and signification of all the parts. It may well astonish us, that with such hidden purposes,—with a foundation, laid on such unfathomable depth, the whole should, at a first view, exhibit an extremely popular appearance."

In a series of matchless soliloquies, we hear Hamlet still reproaching himself with his guilty coldness and delay; still goading his spirit to discharge the debt of vengeance due to his poor father's demanding spirit;—and still in vain!—presenting thus a striking picture of one who lives and dies in a succession of vain repentances, and fruitless resolutions.

These soliloquies, of which there are five, disposed at intervals amidst the ordinary dialogue, like stars of superior magnitude and splendour, deserve our especial attention; both as in themselves pre-eminently fine; and also as finely developing the deep and yet ineffective character of Hamlet. With these soliloquies, as illustrations of Shakspeare's *moral* wisdom and eloquence, I close these Remarks.

In the first soliloquy, the Prince, who has just retired from his heart-sickening conference with his guilty mother, and her unlawful husband, pours out the anguish of his perplexed mind: the mystery of his father's death being not as yet revealed:

"O that this too, too solid flesh would melt!" &c.

Act I., Scene 2.

Soon after this, Hamlet holds his soul-harrowing conference with the night-walking spirit of his father; on whose departure, with the words, "Adieu, remember me!" he thus breathes

his deep vow of fidelity to that pathetic charge :—

“ O, all yon host of heaven ! ” &c.

Act I., Scene 5.

In the third solitary outpouring of his soul, the Prince thus severely upbraids himself with his unworthy silence and inaction, by contrasting it with the passionate energy of the Players; although his was a *real*, theirs a merely fictitious occasion of sorrow :—

“ O what a rogue, and peasant slave am I,” &c.

Act II., Scene 2.

In his next and most celebrated soliloquy, Hamlet, sick of life, in the distraction of his spirit, speaks as one who, hovering over the dread abyss of self-destruction, is restrained and rescued by the awful apprehension of a future state. It is the voice of unrenovated Nature; a melancholy contrast to the happy view of the state after death, opened by Him who has abolished death, illumined Immortality; and delivered those who, through the fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage!—

“ To be, or not to be,” &c.

Act III., Scene 1.

Yet one more of these noble reveries there is, in which Prince Hamlet confesses himself stung and shamed by the material spirit, and self-devotion of Prince Fortinbras and his troops, as before by the artificial vehemence of the Players, contrasted with his own coward-like inactivity. It presents us with one more example of Shakspeare’s mind, ever collecting its full strength and brightness in soliloquy :—

“ How all occasions do inform against me,” &c.

Act IV., Scene 4.

And, thus, in these few selections of Shakspeare’s *moral* excellence, I have given but a scantling of the profusion that remains untouched for our leisurely enjoyment. Over the pages of Hamlet, the moral lessons lie as thickly sown, as the poetic beauties. The wonderful, awful ghost-scene, awakens the presentiment of that unseen, retributory state of departed

spirits, which *most* are propense to forget, but which all are concerned to remember. The very fine dialogue between Hamlet and his mother affords a model for the confessional, and shows (important exhibition,) a guilty conscience trembling (like that of Felix) before the accusing preacher. As Dr. Johnson majestically rounds one of his sonorous periods, in his Preface to Shakspeare : “ the grave-diggers themselves may be heard with applause !” Yes, they supply a rich contrast to Hamlet; the contrast of low-bred, and reckless mirth, to refined and thoughtful melancholy; while they cast up the skull of the King’s late jester, Yorick, and occasion that admired burst of comedy and tragedy.

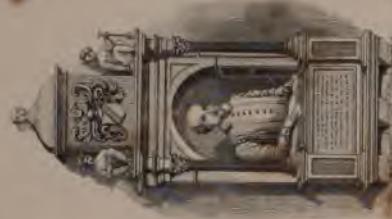
Read by persons of all classes, Shakspeare has long been, and probably will always be—a household book, “ of all sorts enchantingly beloved.” The thing to be desired is, that he should be read (as I am persuaded he may be) with blended profit and delight; so read, at our quiet homes; instead of his beauties being marred, and his influence adulterated, with theatrical alloy. To promote this has been my chief aim in giving these Remarks to the public; in which I have shown that those who read Shakspeare are not condemned to gather straw; but that amidst the straw they may continually light on pearls and diamonds; those who converse with the most wonderful of Poets, “ fram’d in the prodigality of Nature,” are not condemned to starve on husks; but, amidst the husks, they may feast on rich and invigorating fare.

“ Poets,” says Horace, “ purpose either to *profit* or *delight*.” That Shakspeare is, what he aimed to be, a *delightful* writer, all are agreed. That he is, or rather that, duly read, he may become, (whether he aimed to be so or not,) a *profitable* writer, is what I have desired to show and to enforce. Should I have gained my purpose;—should I have stimulated any henceforward to read Shakspeare for instruction, as well as for amusement; for his wisdom as well as for his wit; for his moral sentiment, and practical philosophy, as well as for his imaginative and impassioned poetry, these Remarks will not have been penned in vain.





THE TOMB OF WENCESLAUS, KING OF BOHEMIA



THE TOMB OF FRANCIS D'ASSI, SAINT FRANCIS



THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. VITUS, PRAGUE

Miscellaneous Shaksperiana.

“That which *he* hath writ,
Is with such judgment labour'd and distill'd
Through all the needful *uses* of our life,
That could a man remember but his lines,
He should not touch on any serious point,
But he might breathe his spirit out of him :—
His *learning* savours not the school-like gloss
That most consists in echoing words and terms,
And soonest wins a man an empty name ;
Nor any long or far-fetch'd circumstance ;
But a direct and analytic sum
Of all the worth and first effects of arts :
And for his *poesy*, 'tis so cramm'd with life,
That it shall gather strength of life with being,
And live hereafter more admir'd than now.”

BEN JONSON.

SHAKSPERIAN CENTOS.

There is scarce a topic of remark, or a situation of life, which has not been finely touched by Shakspeare, and of which we might not speak in *his* language. Innumerable modes of illustrating our wonderful and universally-beloved Poet have tasked and displayed the research and ingenuity of his studious admirers. One method there is, which I do not remember to have seen tried ; viz., the piecing together in a *cento* those varied expressions of the same image or sentiment, which lie scattered far and wide over his pages. The following experimental specimens of this Shaksperian patchwork may possibly interest some, and stimulate others to try for themselves the

same kind of not uninstructive amusement, in exploring the inexhaustible treasury of Shakspeare's mind :—

I. LIGHTNING.

“ You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
 Vaunt-couriers to the all-shaking thunder-claps ! ”
 (Thunder, that deep and dreadful organ-pipe !) †
 With your most terrible and nimble stroke
 Of quick cross lightning. ‡ Ye that cease to be
 Ere one can say—It lightens ! § Ye that rather
 Split the unwedgeable and gnarled oak
 Than the soft myrtle ! || O you blinding flames,
 Who, when the blue cross-lightning seem'd to open
 The breast of heaven, would dare present himself
 Even in the aim and very flash of it ? ¶ ”

* LEAR, A. 3, Sc. 2. † TEMPEST, A. 3, Sc. 3. ‡ LEAR, A. 4, Sc. 7.

§ ROMEO, A. 2, Sc. 2. || MEASURE, A. 2, Sc. 2.

¶ JULIUS CAESAR, A. 1, Sc. 3.

NOTE.—Nothing in these fine lines comes up to the marvellous sublimity of that single expression, in the Book of Job; chap. 38, v. 35—“ Canst thou send Lightnings ? or will they come, and say to thee, HERE WE ARE ? ”

II. LOST THINGS VALUED.

“ ————— There's a great spirit gone !
 What our contempt would often hurl from us,
 We wish it ours again. She's good being gone,
 And dear'd being lack'd. For still it so falls out
 That what we have we prize not to its worth,
 While we enjoy it ; but, being lack'd and lost,
 Why then we rack its value ; then we find
 The virtue which possession would not show us,
 While it was ours. Till his deserts are past,
 Our love is seldom link'd to the deserter.”

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA. MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, &c.

III. SLANDER.

“ ————— Oh, 'tis SLANDER,
 Whose edge is sharper than the sword ; whose tongue

Outvenoms all the worms of Nile; whose breath
 Rides on the posting winds, and doth belie
 All corners of the earth. Kings, Queens, and States,
 Maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave,
 This viperous Slander enters.*—Haply SLANDER,
 For ever hous'd where it once gets possession,†
 Whose whisper o'er the world's diameter
 Transports the poison'd shot, may miss our name,
 And hit the woundless air.‡—Good name in all
 Is the immediate jewel of their souls;
 And he that filches from me my good name,
 Robs me of that, which not enriches him,
 And makes me poor indeed.||—Yet be thou chaste as ice,
 Thou 'scap'st not Calumny.§—What king so mighty
 Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?¶
 Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes;
 Pierc'd to the soul with Slander's venom'd spear,
 The which no balm can cure.**

* CYMBELINE, A. 3, Sc. 4. + COMEDY OF ERRORS, A. 3, Sc. 1. ‡ HAMLET, A. 4, Sc. 1.

|| OTHELLO, A. 3, Sc. 3. § HAMLET, A. 3, Sc. 1.

¶ MEASURE FOR MEASURE, A. 3, Sc. 2. ** RICHARD II., A. 1.

ANALYSIS OF THE PLOTS OF THE PLAYS.

He that would imbibe the full benefit of Shakspeare, must read him *slowly, observantly, reflectively*, and (as BACon might say) *chewingly*, so as to “feed on thoughts that voluntary move harmonious numbers.” By an earnest study of this kind, the full sense, beauty, and power of the thoughts and language will marvellously come out.

The mere plot or story of each Play is in general so curiously complicated, that the reader will find a strong effort of memory and reflection required, in order to retrace or rehearse it. We found it so, at least, in an experiment we made on *Cymbeline*, which, in conjunction with the *Tempest*, we are disposed to regard as the most peculiarly *fascinating*, the most purely *Shaksperian*, of all the Plays. The following sketch or outline of the former of these Plays may serve to exemplify the usefulness of such

an exercise, at least as bestowed on the more complicated plots :—

ANALYSIS OF THE STORY OF CYMBELINE.

CYMBELINE, KING OF BRITAIN, in the early times, when it was invaded by the ROMANS, had one only daughter, the heir of his kingdom,—her name *Imogen*,—whom he purposes to give in marriage to *Cloten*, the only son of his Queen, by a former husband. This *Cloten* is an empty, passionate, conceited coxcomb, whom *Imogen*, the loveliest of her sex, regards with extreme aversion, being herself already married to *Leonidas Posthumus*. The King, incensed by his false and jealous Queen, banishes *Posthumus* from his country, although he had bred him up at Court with his own daughter, and had seen him grow up accomplished in all virtues and attainments. So, *Posthumus* takes leave of his beloved Princess, and visits ROME. Here, in a social party at the house of his friend *Philaro*, a dispute arises respecting the beauty and the virtue of their several mistresses ; and *Iachimo*, an unprincipled *Italian*, wagers with *Posthumus* that he will overcome the fidelity of his boasted *British* bride. With this base purpose, *Iachimo* hastens to Britain, and, pretending to be the friend of *Posthumus*, gains access to *Imogen's* bed chamber ; notes not only the apartment, but even a mole on her bosom, as she lies asleep ; he also purloins her diamond ring, and, returning to *Rome*, possesses her husband with the sad conviction that he has stolen her honour, and that she is no more worthy of his regard. He writes to *Pisanio*, a faithful servant, whom he had left attendant on *Imogen*, accusing her of adultery, and desiring him to murder her. At the same time he sends to *Imogen* a letter, saying that he is at *Milford-Haven*, in *South Wales*, whither, (if she be loyal) she may follow him. And this scheme (he tells *Pisanio*) may give the servant opportunity to do the fatal act, which, however, the honest fellow *abjures* with pity and horror. The fond *Imogen*, as directed by *Pisanio*, assumes a man's disguise, and hastens her hard pilgrimage towards *Milford*.

He gives her a box which contains, as he supposes, a sovereign cordial for the stomach, but which the false and malignant Queen had given him in the hope of its poisoning both himself and her. It was warily prepared by her physician *Cornelius*, at her desire; and, he, suspecting her wicked intents, made it a *safe opiate*. In this part of *Wales*, *Belarius*, formerly a Lord in Cymbeline's Court, banished on the false charge of conspiring with the Roman Invaders, resided under the Cambrian name of *Morgan*, with two sons of Cymbeline, *Guiderius*, new-named *Polydore*, and *Arviragus*, now called *Cadwal*, whom (twenty years before) he had stolen from the Court, in revenge for his banishment. These young Princes had grown up in ignorance of their origin, nursed by *Euriphile*, the wife of *Belarius*, whom they regarded as their parents. They are exquisitely portrayed, as feeling and discovering their *princely nature*, in spite of their lowly circumstances; engaged as they were as hunters on the mountains. *Imogen*, their unknown and unconscious sister, disguised as a boy,—after two days of lonely wandering, comes to the cave in which they lodge, and faint with fasting, falls to feeding on what she finds there. Just at the moment return the old man and the two boys, who (as by the subtle sympathy of Nature, and the secret instinct of consanguinity,) are changed into instantaneous love of the fair youth, *Fidele*, or *Imogen*. She, feeling very unwell from her hard journey, tastes of the drug which *Pisanio* had given her as a cordial, and sinks into a death-like sleep. The two boys find her lying (as they suppose) dead, and, having sung her dirge, lay her out in the cave.—And here it must be mentioned, what might have been told before, that *Cloten*, the Queen's silly son, enraged by *Imogen*'s preference of *Posthumus* to himself, had learned from her attendant *Pisanio*, her flight to *Milford*, and followed her steps to this very cave, with the malicious hope of murdering *Posthumus*, and dishonouring *Imogen*.—Returning to the cave, where they had left the sick *Fidele*, the old man and his two boys encounter this *Cloten* just arrived. *Guiderius* (*Polydore*,) insulted by him, cuts off *Cloten*'s head with his own sword, and throws his bloody corpse into the creek behind

their rock, which was therefore on the sea coast. *Imogen*, awaking from her trance, mistakes the headless trunk of *Cloten* for her *Posthumus*, murdered (as she imagines) by *Pisanio*, whom she suspects of having attempted her own life by the drug that had so deeply stupified her. *Lucius*, leader of the Roman troops, takes *Fidele* for his page, with much kindness, won by her beauty and worth. By him she is assisted in burying *Cloten*, her supposed *Posthumus*. *Cymbeline*, troubled all at once about his Queen's illness, the absence of *Cloten*, and, most of all, the loss of *Imogen*,—extorts information from *Pisanio*, and proceeds toward Milford, on his war with the Romans, to whose leader he has given a defiance.

As the forces are now mustering in that part of Wales, old *Belarius*, alarmed by *Polydore's* murder of the Prince *Cloten*, advises his boys to hide in the mountains; but *they*, impelled by their princely blood, are bent on joining the Britons in the battle. *Pisanio* has written to *Posthumus* that *Imogen is dead*, and, in accordance with his master's order, pretends that he has slain her, as the victim of her imputed crime, in token of which he gives him the bloody cloth taken from *Cloten's* corpse. *Posthumus* now makes his appearance, having arrived from Italy with the *Roman* troops; but, smitten with remorse, he resolves to join the *British* force. In the garb of a poor soldier, he disarms the false *Iachimo*, whose guilt makes him powerless in fight. At first the *Britons* fly, and *Cymbeline*, their King, is taken. On a sudden the battle is turned by the bravery of old *Belarius* and the two young Princes, who, in a narrow path, rescue *Cymbeline*. *Lucius*, the Roman leader, bids his tender page *Fidele* retire for safety, and himself is taken by the bravery of the three mountaineers, aided by *Posthumus*. Two *British* Captains present to the now victorious King, *Posthumus*, who is thrown into a jail. Now comes before the King in his tent, *Belarius* and the two Princes, whom he welcomes as the preservers of his throne, and who relate the heroic acts of the poor soldier, found to be none other than *Posthumus*. These three *Cymbeline* dubs as knights. Then comes in *Cornelius*, the physician, with tidings of the Queen's

death, and her confession of her criminal attempts on the lives even of the *King* and his daughter. *Lucius*, the Roman General, appears next, with his *fair page*, whom the cave-dwellers wonderfully recognise. *Iachimo*, called upon by *Fidele*, makes a full confession of the methods by which he got the important *diamond ring*. *Posthumus*, wrought up to fury by the tale, strikes the supposed page, his own *Imogen*, whom at that moment *Pisanio* points out as the true lost *Imogen*. *Posthumus* staggers; *Cymbeline* is in ecstacy; *Imogen* charges *Pisanio* with having attempted to poison her; *Cornelius* explains the riddle of the drugs. She embraces her *husband*, then kneels for his blessing to *her father*. *Pisanio* tells how he sent away *Cloten* in quest of *Imogen*. *Guiderius* tells how he slew *Cloten*. The *King* dooms him to *death*, as the murderer of the *Prince*. *Belarius* discovers himself: the *King* flies out on him as a “banished traitor.” He demands pay for the nursing of the King’s two sons. *Cymbeline* hears the explanation, astonished and overjoyed, and admires their *instinctive love* of their unknown sister. The brothers embrace her; and finally, a Roman Soothsayer expounds first a *dream* of *Posthumus*, now fulfilled in these happy events, and then his own vision, previously told to *Lucius*, before the battle, portending the union between *Cæsar* and *Cymbeline*.

BRIEF NOTES TO “CYMELINE.”—*Cymbeline* is one of the most delightful, though not the most celebrated, of Shakspeare’s productions; as, among his *romantic* dramas, it is one of his most romantic. As *Macbeth* is his Scottish, *Cymbeline* may be called his Welsh drama; and it is beautified with the wildness of Cambria’s mountain scenery. Johnson, who it must be confessed, betrays a very defective sensibility to exquisite beauty in several of his remarks on the Plays of Shakspeare, is provokingly cold and superficial in his brief notice of the inimitable *Cymbeline*, which he disposes of much in the manner of a stonemason, estimating by his measuring *line* the merits of the Venus or the Apollo. This drama, without being

splendid, possesses a wild sweetness peculiar to itself; and, perhaps, in its *Imogen* and old *Belarius*, with those “two princely boys” in whom “divine Nature so blazons herself,” may be as fine and as fascinating as anything its magic author has left. Like the *Tempest*, it appears to be one of his latest and maturest pieces. *Imogen*, (with *Desdemona*’s pardon, and certainly with *Miranda*’s leave,) is the sweetest of his fair ones; her loveliness being brightened, like the pining *Viola*’s, with the charm of a boy’s disguise.

Midst the wilderness of beauties contending for admiring notice, I shall content myself with transcribing the few detached and unstudied remarks I had penned in an interleaved copy, at the time of perusal.—Act I., scene 2d and 4th. What masterpieces of elegant tenderness, these interviews between *Imogen* and *Posthumus* at parting, and between *Imogen* and *Pisanio*, after the departure of *Posthumus*! The latter is one of his most exquisite scenes, where every line is sweetness.—Act II., scene 2. How vividly portrayed *Iachimo*’s visit to her chamber, and her sleeping loveliness!—Act III. The beauties thicken and brighten upon us as we advance through this and the next Act. Scene 2. Was ever the impatience of love to meet its object more exquisitely represented than here, by the delicate, yet impassioned *Imogen*? Scene 3. Scarce a scene in all his Plays equals this in romantic beauty; its charm is similar to that of the forest scenery in Act II. of *As You Like It*. In both these scenes there is the same intermixture of *moral sentiments* with picturesque nature. The fascinating cast of scenery and sentiment is continued to Scene 6, and in the 2d Scene of Act IV., where *Imogen* appears as the boy *Fidele* to her unknown and unknowing, yet instinctively attached brothers. The deep pathos of her preceding interview with *Pisanio*, at Milford, (in Act III., Scene 4,) reminds us of the similarly pathetic scene between *Desdemona* and *Othello*, (Act IV., Scene 2.) There is the truth of Nature as well as the beauty of imagination, in the “unlearned royalty” of the two princely peasant boys, “gentle as zephyrs, not wagging the violet’s sweet head,” and yet “rough as the rudest wind that

takes the mountain pine by the top, and makes him stoop to the vale." It is a charming example of Horace's remark, "*Fortes creantur fortibus,*" &c.—Act IV., Scene 2. The song of "Native woodnotes wild," beginning "Fear no more the heat of the sun," is far more appropriate to the singers and the scene, and more truly touching in its antique rudeness, than Collins' elegant substitute, "To fair Fidele's grassy tomb."—Act V. abounds more in business than beauty; we miss the enchanting images and sentiments on which we have been luxuriating; but a most ingenious and surprising developement of a mazy and mysterious plot is here presented. The threads of this eventful tale, after having been curiously intertwined and puzzled, are as curiously unravelled in the closing scenes; while retributive justice crowns the whole; leaving us, as we rise from the finished perusal, to transfer the apostrophe engraven upon Ben Jonson to one who better deserved it, and exclaim—"Oh rare Will Shakspeare!"

BRIEF NOTES ON SOME OF THE PLAYS.

NOTES TO HAMLET.—*Lear* is most pathetic; *Hamlet* most melancholy; *Othello*, most terrible. *Lear* displays paternal passion; *Hamlet*, deep melancholy; *Othello*, absorbing jealousy. *Lear* is, perhaps, the finest of all the Plays; it speaks most mightily to our hearts. The third Act is as powerful as any in the universal drama. The whole tragedy is as impressive in its MORAL as in its PATHETIC quality. The unnatural daughters turn out adulteresses and murderesses.

Immense power of mind and language signalises *Hamlet* above most of these Plays. It demands a separate effort of attention for each act. It is certainly one of Shakspeare's most *perfect compositions*. The first act is one of the noblest in his Plays. Act I., Sc. 1, end, "Some say," &c. Harrowed by the Ghost, and benumbed by the cold night, we are soothed and charmed by this unexpected lyrical strain of Christmas-greeting Chanticleer.

While the learned MILTON has a thousand imitations of HOMER and VIRGIL, HORACE, OVID, and others, in his classic poetry; our wild, untutored SHAKSPEARE presents numerous instances of undesigned resemblance to the antients; passages, purely original in him, which may be paralleled with corresponding passages of writers whom he had never seen. An interesting specimen occurs in that acutely conceived, but somewhat obscurely evolved, observation of *Hamlet*, which immediately precedes the entrance of the Ghost: Act I., Sc. 4, "So oft it chances in particular men," &c. This nice and true observation, founded on the quick-sightedness of our Nature to the *faults* of others, occurs more than once in the manners-painting Horace:—

"Discit enim citius, meminitque libentius illud
Quod quis deridet, quām quod probat et veneratus."

Lib. II., Epist. 1.

" Vitiis mediocribus, ac mea paucis,
Mendoza est natura, alioqui recta; velut si
Egregio inspersos reprehendas corpore nōvos."

Lib. I., Sat. 6.

This *general* censure, for a *particular* fault, is ungenerous and unjust; one should rather say:—

" ubi plura nitent, non ego paucis
Offendar maculis, quas aut incuria fudit,
Aut humana parūm cavit natura."—*Horace.*

Act I., Scene 1—

"But soft! methinks I scent the morning air."

This remarkably resembles what Virgil makes the ghost of Anchises say to his son *Æneas*:—

"Jamque vale! torquet medios nox humida cursus,
Et me sevus equis Oriens adflavit anhelis."

Æn. V. : 735.

Like the ghost of *Anchises*, this of *Hamlet's* father, speaks of his *abode* :—

“ . . . Non me impia namque
Tartara habent, tristesque umbre.”

“ . . . While memory holds her seat
In this distracted globe.”

Shakspeare's globe-like cranium finely represented this, when he acted as the Ghost. *He* was the real *Hamlet* of his own imagination.

“ Must give us pause.—*To dream!*—There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.”

Act III., Scene 1.

The insertion of the words, “To dream,” appears necessary, at once to complete the line, and to enforce the sentiment, which demands such an emphatic reiteration. The expression in the next line, “of so long life,” is simply equivalent with “so long lived.” Compare those incomparable lines, uttered by *Claudio*, in “Measure for Measure”:

“ Aye, but to die, and go we know not where,” &c.

We see, in such passages as these, what SHAKSPEARE himself thought and felt in reference to the awful transition of Death. He seems, in truth, to have employed HAMLET, more than any other of his varied characters, as an eloquent expositor of his own secret musings on subjects the most important and the most interesting to every human being; a vent or vehicle for the confessions of his own soul.

“ By these pickers and stealers :” i.e., *these hands*.

Act III., Scene 2.

An allusion, perhaps, to that clause in the Church Catechism, which bids us “to keep our *hands* from picking and stealing.”

“ Try what repentance can,” &c.

Act III., Scene 4.

This is strongly resembled in Milton's fine soliloquy of Satan to the Sun :

“Oh, then, at last relent!—Is there no place
Left for repentance,” &c.

The fourth Act is written, throughout, with great vigour and vividness of thought and diction. In the noble speech of *Hamlet*, beginning (Scene 4) :

“How all occasions do inform against me !”

Shakspeare shows how his mind always awakes and brightens in *soliloquy*.

“To know a man well, were to know himself.”

Act V., Scene 2.

The meaning is obscure, and may be thus variously interpreted :

1. It were to know him, as he knows himself.
2. It were to *know*, or to excel, *himself*; and thus to assume that he was, at least *equal*; the less being praised of the better.
3. It were to *know himself*, the highest point of knowledge, the famous *γνῶθι σεαυτόν*.

The second is the most appropriate meaning, as the preceding context implies. The sentiment is fine: it is only as we realise excellence in ourselves, that we can estimate it in others.

Goëthe, Coleridge, Schlegel, Hazlitt, Strachey, and others, have written with great effort and talent on the character of HAMLET. A striking proof of SHAKSPEARE's depth. Critics have won fame by elaborately analysing this single character of *his creation*.

CORIOLANUS.—Aristocratic pride personified. A prolonged, full-fraught, and very noble Tragedy; a majestic structure, on a small foundation. Very great tragic power and pathos are displayed. Perhaps, the finest of all (at least the *Roman*)

Historical Plays ; the hero commanding, in the highest degree, alike our admiration and our grief. The first Act alone, with its ten great scenes, is a mighty drama in itself. The first Scene alone outweighs a whole play of our better modern dramatists. The old *Aesopian* fable of "the Belly and the Members,"—how excellently well is it told and applied by *Menenius* ; with his singularly correct and vivid representation, (admired by medical judges,) of the *Stomach*. How the Poet's heroic fire sparkles forth in *Volumnia*, a true Roman mother of a Roman hero !—(Act I., Scene III.) In Act III., Scene II., the audience receive a most impressive lecture on the folly, the ruinous frenzy, of excessive pride, and uncurbed anger.

.
"I shall be lov'd, when I am lack'd,"

Act IV., Scene I.

exactly corresponds with the fine pathetic *Horatian* remark :

"Urit qui fulgore, . . . extinctus amabitur idem."

This idea is thus beautifully unfolded by COWPER :—

"Not to understand a treasure's worth,
Till time hath stolen away the slighted good,
Is cause of half our poverty."

It is what BYRON has called "*the late remorse of love.*"

It is a favourite sentiment with SHAKSPEARE : thus, in "*Antony and Cleopatra,*" Act I., Scene IV. :

"It hath been taught us from the primal state,
That the ebb'd man, ne'er lov'd till ne'er worth love,
Comes dear'd by being lack'd."

TEMPEST.—Considered with much *internal* probability, to be one of his very *latest* productions, as it is one of his finest and most enchanting creations. It stands well in the front of his volume, as the most purely Shaksperian of all the Plays. The first Act alone, stamps its author as the *first* imaginative genius

extant ; in this Act, the dialogue between *Prospero* and *Miranda* (Sc. II.) is most *natural*, and therefore most *beautiful* :—the dialogue between *Prospero* and *Ariel*, which follows it, is most *fancifully* natural :—the dialogue between *Prospero* and *Caliban*, contrasted with the last, is in the same *marvellous* style of fancy :—and then, the passion between *Ferdinand* and *Miranda*, so naturally, yet suddenly coming upon each; all this throng of unexampled beauty, so diversified, in one scene ! The mixture of true *delicacy*, and *frank affection instantly rising* at the first meeting of *Ferdinand*, is charmingly portrayed in *Miranda*, and recommended to us by her singular circumstances. Act II. opens with one of those inimitably natural, animated, racy conversations, which seem as if they *must* have been taken down from *life*. Those lines, “ I saw him beat the surges, &c.,” are one of those scraps of *unimprovable eloquence*, which, at times, he throws off in the full career of his dialogue.—Act II., Scene II. This dialogue, between such strange characters, is excellently *comic*, and shows us Shakspeare indulging in his *frolics*. Then, with the opening of the *next scene* (Act III.) we have an *instant* transition from *tipsy fun* to the most *elegant tenderness* imaginable ; from the *coarsest* to the most *refined* cast of nature : a more lovely love-scene is nowhere to be found, than this between *Ferdinand*, bearing the logs, and his impassioned mistress.

It is remarkable how *incidentally* the grand and noted passage, inscribed on his monument in Westminster Abbey, comes in, “ The cloud-capt towers, &c.,” (Act IV.,) it is the reverse of the “ *splendidus assuetur pannus*.” In this fine fancy-piece, Shakspeare holds on to the close, in his best manner : a rare instance.

“ Yea, all which *it* inherit shall dissolve.”

Act IV., Scene I.

This appears to be the true reading ; though commonly quoted “ all which it inherits.” We are reminded of a sublime passage in *Isaiah*, (chap. LI., v. 6,) “ The heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment,

and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner.” “ All these things shall be dissolved.” (II. Peter III., v. 11.)

. . . . “ We shall all be turn’d to apes,
With foreheads villainous low.”

Act V., Scene I.

Shakspeare seems to have anticipated phrenology. He certainly beheld in a glass the reverse of this low-browed head in his own unequalled altitude of forehead.

. . . . “ Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves !” &c.

This fine apostrophe has been supposed an imitation of *Medea's* speech in *Ovid's Metam.*, Lib. VII., which was translated in *Shakspeare's* time :

“ Auræque, et venti, montesque, amnesque, lacusque,
Dique omnes nemorum,” &c.

The resemblance is remarkable ; but *Shakspeare* has left *Ovid* far behind, in richness of imagery, and energy of diction. There is an unusual and admirable stateliness and solemnity in the flow and tone of these noble lines.

This charming Play ranks among the richest creations of his fancy, and among the most matured and finished of his compositions. How inimitably-conceived and combined are the solemn magician and his fascinating daughter ; how happily contrasted those two preternatural creatures—the delicate Spirit and the human Monster ! Such rare and varied figures are well placed in the foreground of the volume, and present a fine and perfect sample of the Universal Genius.

OTHELLO.—This great production, exhibiting a tragedy in private life, is composed in a more careless style of verse and diction than *Hamlet*. Mighty in its interest and pathos, it is less interesting and less noble in its design and in its characters, than *Hamlet*, *Lear*, or *Macbeth*. It is the most neatly-constructed of all these great Tragedies ; the most purely “sim-

plex et unum." In this respect, and also in the character of its theme, it answers to the "*Oedipus Tyrannus*" of SOPHOCLES. It is the most powerfully tragical of all tragedies, if we except *Lear*. It suffers, however, a serious injury, from the mixture of so much coarse vulgarity, which cannot be read aloud, and which tends to debase and defile the reader's mind.

Iago is the arch-fiend of dramatic monsters ; the bye-word to brand slanderers. He out-demons the *Mephistopheles* of *FAUST*. The magnificent soul of *Shakspeare* selected the vice of *Slander* for *special abhorrence and reprobation*—either in "*discourse of thought, or actual deed.*" (Act IV., Scene II.) This is the reading of the old copies, and it is right. So we have "*discourse of reason,*" in *Hamlet*, and again in *Troilus and Cressida*; *discursus* for *exercise*. The emendation, "*discourse, or thought,*" was made by *Pope*, and adopted by *Steevens*.

. "I have *much to do,*
But to go hang my head all at one side."

Act IV., Scene III.

i.e., '*much ado*,' much difficulty, '*not to go*,' &c. These lines of inimitable pathos have been exquisitely adapted to music, by *Shield*, showing how singularly susceptible of musical expression are some of the most beautiful passages. "*She never told her love,*" from *Twelfth Night*, as represented by *HAYDN*, is, probably, the finest of all existing songs, at least of all comprised within so few lines and notes.

. "It is the cause," &c.

Act V., Scene II.

It is the *cause*, the *crime* which he supposes *Desdemona* to have committed, that forces him on to this horrible act of justice. Dr. JOHNSON allows that "*the abruptness of this soliloquy renders it obscure.*"

"Put out the light; and then"—

(a natural break of *aposiopesis*)

"Do the unutterable deed!"—*Ibid.*

"But they are cruel tears: *this sorrow's heavenly,*" &c.—*Ibid.*

This has always appeared to me, (probably to most,) a passage at once peculiarly *obscure*, and (at such a crisis) peculiarly *interesting*. The meaning may be, “I *must* weep; but these *tears* are cruelly mis-spent on one so guilty; while the *sorrow*, which thus expresses itself in tears, is of *heavenly* quality, and (like “*HIM* who chastises whom He loves,”) smites the very object of its affection. (*Proverbs*, 3d c., 12th v., and *Epistle to Hebrews*, 12th c., 6th v.) It is possible that here, as in the next instance, there may be a special reference to *Christ*, as the transcendent example of Heaven smiting when it loves.

. “One whose hand,
Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away,
Richer than all his tribe.”

Act V., Scene II.

This is justly considered to be an allusion to *Herod*, in the play of *Marianne*:

“I had but one inestimable jewel.”

See BYRON’s admirable “*Lament of Herod over Marianne*.” Uninformed of this historical allusion, we might have supposed an allusion to the base traitor, *Judas*, who threw away the pearl, *CHRIST*. At present, there is no room for a doubt that the first is the true interpretation.

.
“And smote him——*thus*.”

Nothing could be more ingeniously imagined, or more felicitously startling by suddenness, than this death of *Othello*, associated in his last words with his patriotic defence of an insulted countryman from a Turk.

Had not SHAKSPEARE the moral design of punishing poor *Desdemona* for her filial disobedience, by her conjugal calamity; and, at the same time, punishing poor *Othello*, for his robbery of her father, by his loss of herself? This, with *Lear*, is the most powerful, the most oppressive, in tragic pathos, of all these Plays; possibly at once the *last*, and (as a drama) the *best*, of all. It appears to have been Dr. JOHNSON’s most ad-

mired favourite, as, in his splendid Preface to *Shakspeare*, he singles it out as the contrasted antagonist to ADDISON's *Cato*.

The most obvious and the most important moral, enforced by *Othello*, is the dreadful nature and deadly effect of *Jealousy*, or, (as it is here exemplified) of *Conjugal Suspicion*. When was there so splendid a comment on those burning words of the inspired Hebrew Poet, “*Jealousy is cruel as the grave ; its flames are as flames of fire ; as the lightning of Heaven*,” as sparks (we may add) that fall on gunpowder? *Shakspeare* saw the epidemic propensity to *Slander*, on the one side, and to *Suspicion* on the other; and in this, perhaps, the last and most powerful of his Plays, he has read a very valuable lesson both to *husbands* and *wives*: to *husbands*, that they “beware of jealousy, the green-eye'd monster, that makes the meat it feeds on!” beware of admitting rash suspicions, founded on some doubtful appearance or report;—to *wives*, that they beware of affording room for jealousy or scandal, by indiscretion, however *innocently* indulged;—to *both*, that they estimate each others feelings by their own.

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.—To this splendid Play we well may apply the commendation bestowed on its heroine, (Act II., Scene II.,)

“Age cannot wither it, nor custom stale
Its infinite variety.”

Its brilliant and changeful character is most appropriate to that of the hero, and to that of the heroine, named in its title. Immense power is put forth with apparent ease, in the delineation of *character*, and in the supply of appropriate incident, and sentiment, and diction. There are not fewer than 38 Scenes, and 33 persons. Rarely does the mighty Dramatist close a Tragedy with so much dignity, pathos, and expressive composition, as in the last admirable Scene. His genius was now in its zenith, at about his 40th year.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.—Had we not this production of SHAKSPEARE's all-excelling genius, who could have supposed that he would so spiritedly and intelligently portray the Gre- cian Heroes, and bring old HOMER on an English stage? Great acumen and strength appear in the longer speeches of the heroes. There is a world of wit, spirit, and easy cleverness, in this entertaining, though neglected, Play, which sparkles with a thousand bright thoughts and expressions. The third Scene of the third Act is a masterpiece of acute intelligence, and re- quires our best attention. The speech of *Ulysses*, commencing, “Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,” &c., is character- istic and worthy of the sagacious and eloquent *Ithacan*; a speci- men of our Poet's metaphysical, moral, and monitory wisdom. The ribaldry of *Thersites* outdoes everything of its kind. Such characters as *Pandarus* and *Cressida* are too vulgarly vicious to allure or pollute: they are despised or detested: the coarse- ness brings its own antidote; and thus Shakspeare vindicates himself. On the whole, amazing fertility, brilliancy, natural- ness, and spirit, pervade and *Shakspeareise* this wild play; the absence of which (whatever be its faults) would have left a serious chasm in the all-including Drama of *Shakspeare*.

“*Ulysses*. One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”

Act III., Scene III.

This last Scene of the third Act, in which the sage and elo- quent *Ulysses* appears as chief speaker, is, in its kind, one of the most masterly in SHAKSPEARE, and bravely shows his strong good sense, as well as his inventive fertility in thought and diction. The line above selected is one of those which, by their natural force, and breadth of meaning, have passed into proverbial citations. Taken thus apart from the connexion, it seems to be equivalent with the famous line of TERENCE,—

“*Homo sum; humani nihil à me alienum puto.*”

Let a man utter some great sentiment of nature, some genuine emotion of soul, some deep human feeling, and all that hear

sympathise and applaud. Thus taken, it is the sentiment of HORACE,—

“Et ridentibus adrident, ita flentibus adflent,
Humani vultus. Si vis me flere, dolendum est
Primùm ipsi tibi.”

Taken in its connexion with the speech in which it occurs, it bears a definite and limited application to the instance so eloquently stated, and simply affirms *the unanimous sympathy of mankind with a present object, to the disregard of past interests.*

TIMON OF ATHENS.—Misanthropy personified. This Play, one of the strong flights of his genius, reads a striking lesson to *spendthrifts*. It is a fine moral Tragedy, not entirely dissimilar in its kind to *Lear*; marked by a melancholy fidelity to the epidemic ingratitude of worldly flatterers. It must have awokened a sad and deep sympathy in many an unfortunate reader. Nothing can be finer, in the way of enraged invective and imprecation, than the effusions of *Timon's* wounded spirit; the burning eloquence of Resentment, inspired by Ingratitude. (Act IV., Scenes I. and III.) *Byron* must have revelled in the perusal. This Play is on a narrower basis, and a smaller scale, than most of the others; more like a portrait than a group, in painting.

TWELFTH NIGHT.—This elegant Comedy and the **TEMPEST** have been supposed by some critics to be the very last-written of his Plays. It contains, perhaps, his most perfect passages of refined delicacy and beauty, and bears internal marks of that maturest age to which **DRAKE** and **CHALMERS** assign it. In none of his Plays is there a more remarkable intermixture and contrast of the merry and the serious, of exquisitely comic parts with inimitable touches of tenderness and grace. *Viola*, in company with *Imogen*, may be regarded as

one of his most engaging, most attaching female characters. What scene of tenderness can be named with that in which *Viola* disguisedly reveals to the *Duke* her secret love of himself? (Act II., Scene IV.,) a scene which attains its highest point of beauty in those words which HAYDN has “ married to immortal notes,”—

“ She never told her love,” &c.

The little song of the seemingly tipsy *Clown*, at the close, may be considered worthy of attention, as containing (if the critics date this Play correctly) the last-recorded lines of the greatest Genius which Nature has produced. There is, I think, more moral meaning, more method, in these (at first view) senseless, graceless verses, than many may suppose. They present a gamesome sketch of human life, interlaced with the burden,—

“ For the rain it raineth every day,”

an olden saying, here introduced in reference to the rainy season of January, for which the Play (like “ Winter’s Tale,”) was prepared. The import is, the *boy* might *fool* with indulgence; but the *man* would be discarded for *dishonesty*. The fool in *Lear*, sings a similar song, with the same burden. “ Twelfth Night” is the olden name for “ Epiphany,” January 6th, or the twelfth day after Christmas: a season of festivities, theatrical as well as domestic, among our Elizabethan ancestors.

ANECDOTE.—I well remember the following dialogue, which passed between myself and the *late* JOHN FOSTER, the author of the celebrated “ Essays.” The scene was a Library: several large biographies of then recent date, (such as *Wilberforce’s* and *Mrs. More’s*,) lay on the table before us. I contrasted the superabundance of *Modern* with the scantiness of *Older* biography, and expressed a wish to recover, in particular, *one* Life, of the olden times, in preference to all others, as well as to scores of *modern* memoirs. Mr. Foster inquired, “ Whose Life?” I answered, with some apology for such a choice, “ SHAKESPEARE’S.” Mr. F. promptly replied, “ No need of apology; I’ll *SECOND* you, Sir.”

On another occasion, sitting with Mr. Foster, in his retreat at Stapleton, near Bristol, I remarked that *Shakspeare* was a sounder Divine than some of our professed theologians and preachers; and instanced his emphatic avowals of our Fallen Nature's epidemic depravity, as compared with their flattering pictures of Human Dignity. In illustration of the remark, I quoted the words, uttered (it is true) by the misanthropic *Timon*, yet scarcely more severe than the statements of *HOLY WRIT*, (*Genesis*, VI. c., 5th v.; *Jeremiah*, XVII. c., 9th v.; *Romans*, III. c., 9th and 18th v.) On hearing these lines—

. . . . “All’s oblique,
There’s nothing level in our cursed nature,
But direct villainy,”

Timon, Act IV., Scene 3.

Mr. Foster eagerly said, “Does *Shakspeare* say *that*? repeat *that* once more; I had forgotten *that*.” On the second hearing, he characteristically added, “Aye, aye, *that’s it*. Why, to be sure, a man like *Shakspeare*, who looked so keenly into himself, as well as into all around him, would come to the right conclusion, and agree with the Scriptures on the palpable fact of human depravity.” Testimonies less open to objection might have been produced from *Shakspeare*; but *this* one expressed Mr. Foster’s own deep conviction.

SHAKSPERIAN HYGIÉNE.

SHAKSPERE, who has left no subject untouched, and truly, “*nullum quod tetigit, non ornavit*,”—“nothing has he touched, that he has not adorned,”—has scattered through many of his wondrous Plays scraps of medical experience, of equal truth and wisdom with anything that science can teach us. A few of these *Hygiénic* maxims, or plain Rules of Health, we here subjoin.

First, then, we have the important functions of the Stomach in the animal economy accurately sketched in the Fable of the Belly and the Members, in "Coriolanus." The Stomach thus replies to the rebellious Limbs :—

"True it is, my incorporate friends, quoth he,
That I receive the general food at first,
Which you do live upon : and fit it is ;

Because I am the store-house and the shop
Of the whole body. But, if you do remember,
I send it through the rivers of your blood,
E'en to the court—the heart,—to the seat o' the brain,
And through the cranks and offices of man :
The strongest nerves and small inferior veins
From me receive that natural competency,
By which they live."

And now,

"May good digestion wait on appetite,
And health on both ;"*

rather than

"A sick man's appetite, who desires most that
Which would increase his evil :"†

at the same time remembering, that

"Nature's with little pleas'd, enough's a feast."

"And truly, for aught I see, they are as sick that surfeit with *too much*,
as they which starve with nothing."‡

While, as regards intemperance in strong drinks, well may we say with *Cassio*,—

"O that men should put an enemy into their mouths to steal away their brains!"||

or, with *Cæsar*,—

"It's monstrous labour when I wash my brain,
And it grows fouler."§

* Macbeth. + Coriolanus. ‡ Merchant of Venice. || Othello. § Antony and Cleopatra.

Diseases are, indeed, the interest paid for pleasures, or rather perhaps, for excesses,—more particularly those of the table; and too many of us, sooner or later, learn by experience, that

“The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scourge us.” *

How often is the wealthy *gourmand*, e'en though
“Epicurean cooks
Sharpen with cloyless sauce the appetite,” †
tempted to exclaim—

“Will Fortune never come with both hands full?
She either gives a stomach and no food;
Such are the poor in health;—or else a feast,
And takes away the stomach; such are the rich,
That have abundance and enjoy it not.” ‡

The influence of the mind on the digestive functions did not also escape the all-observing eye of our Poet. Thus he makes *Henry VIII.*, in giving *Cardinal Wolsey* the schedule of his ill-gotten wealth, express himself in this manner :—

“Read o'er this—(*giving him papers*)
And after, this; and then to breakfast,
With what appetite you may.”

Nor is the “green and yellow melancholy” of her who “never told her love,” to be regarded as a metaphorical or poetic fiction.

Our Great Dramatist beautifully apostrophises Sleep and its blessings in the following lines :—

“O, Sleep; O, gentle Sleep; innocent Sleep!” ||
“Sleep that unknits the ravell'd sleeve of care;
The death of each day's life; sore Labour's bath;
Balm of hurt minds; great Nature's second course;
Chief nourisher in life's feast:” §

“O, gentle Sleep,
Nature's soft nurse, how have I frighted thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh mine eyelids down,

* Lear. † Antony and Cleopatra. ‡ Henry IV., Part II. || Ibid. § Macbeth.

And steep my senses in forgetfulness ?
 Why rather, Sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,
 Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,
 Than in the perfum'd chambers of the great,
 With all appliances and means to boot ?"*

The benefit of early rising we may learn even from the facetious *Sir Toby Belch*, for, says he,

" Not to be a-bed after midnight is to be *up* betimes : and '*diliculò surgere saluberrimum est*,' thou knowest." †

whilst the value and necessity of exercise and of active exertion in promoting sleep—the poor man's best friend—are shown in such passages as these :—

" Weariness can snore upon the flint, while resty Sloth
 Finds the down pillow hard."‡

Rarely indeed are the indolent and luxurious

" As fast locked up in sleep as guiltless Labour,
 When it lies starkly in the traveller's bones." ||

" The wretched slave
 Gets him to rest, cramm'd with distressful bread ;
 Never sees horrid Night, the child of Hell ;
 But, like a lacquey, from the rise to set,
 Sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and all night
 Sleeps in Elysium." §

" Happy low, lie down !
 Enjoy the honey-heavy dew of Slumber !
 Thou hast no figures and no fantasies,
 That busy Care draws in the brains of men." ¶

" Do not omit the heavy offer of it,
 It seldom visits Sorrow ; when it doth,
 It is a comforter." **

In truth, compared with such medicine as healthful exercise,
 " the most sovereign prescription in Galen is but empiricutive,

* Henry IV., Part II. + Twelfth Night. † Measure for Measure. || Ibid.

§ Henry V. ¶ Julius Cæsar. ** Tempest.

and to this preservative of no better repute than a horse-drench :* so, that he who makes good use of it, may almost say, "I will make a lip at the physician,"† and is half disposed to exclaim with *Macbeth*,—

"Throw physic to the dogs, I'll none of it!"

"Out loathed medicine, hated poison, hence!"‡

each of us thus becoming more or less his own doctor, and proving that

"The labour we delight in physics pain."||

That excessive exercise of the mind is injurious to the body, impairing the activity of the nutritive processes, is seen constantly in the lean, wan, shrivelled aspect of hard students,— "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought."§ Shakspeare did not overlook this fact, when he makes Cæsar say—

"Let me have men about me that are fat,
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights,
Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look,
He thinks too much."¶

Overtasking the mind, like over-exertion of the body, tends to the premature decay, and not seldom to the exhaustion and overthrow of its powers ; many melancholy instances of which have been exhibited, more especially among literary enthusiasts. In connection with this—the greatest of all human calamities—we need merely remind the reader of our Poet's two mightiest productions, *Hamlet* and *Lear*. "Of all poets (observes the eminent German critic, Schlegel,) perhaps Shakspeare alone has portrayed the mental diseases—melancholy, delirium, lunacy—with such inexpressible, and, in every respect, definite truth, that the physician may enrich his observations from them in the same manner as from real cases." Too fre-

* Coriolanus. † Ibid. ‡ Midsummer Nigth's Dream. || Ibid. § Hamlet.
¶ Julius Cæsar.

quently, alas, however, it is in vain to enquire in the striking language of Macbeth :—

“ Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written tablets of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of the perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart ?”

C. V. G.

ADDENDUM TO THE NOTES TO “HAMLET.”—*Hamlet*. “ We defy augury : there is a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come ; if it be not to come, it will be now ; if it be not now, yet it will come : *the readiness is all* : since no man, of aught he leaves, knows, what is't to leave betimes ?”—(Act V., Scene II.)

A brief, but very sententious and remarkable speech ; especially as illustrative of *Hamlet's* deep and difficult character. The sentiment is in exact harmony with his noted soliloquy on Death, as “ a consummation devoutly to be wish'd,” by those who would, by dying, “ end their heart-ache.” Just before the present passage, the melancholy Prince had said to his friend *Horatio*,—“ Thou wouldest not think how ill all's here about my heart ; but it is no matter.” This is said in expectation of his fencing with *Laertes*, which proves fatal to both. There is great signification in the brief remark—“ *the readiness is all* ;” it is a sermon in a word ; and reminds us of the Divine Warning : “ Be ye ready.” The meaning is unfolded in those few memorable words of the Angel to Adam :

“ Nor love thy life, nor hate ; but what thou liv'st
Live well : how long, or short, permit to heaven.”

Paradise Lost, Book XI.

“ Since the time of our dying is foreordered by Providence, and we retain no knowledge of what we leave behind ; what

~~we leave behind~~

matter how soon we die? *The readiness for death is all.*" One of the many noble thoughts, and mighty truths, flung over his pages by our wild, deep, universal SHAKSPEARE; thick, and bright, and varied as the stars over the midnight heavens!

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Which to choose, I *doubtful* am yet;
LEAR, OTHELLO, or Prince HAMLET:
Certain, none has found its fellow,
HAMLET, LEAR, or fam'd OTHELLO.

II.

If my doubtful thought I tell you;
LEAR and HAMLET beat OTHELLO:
Twixt the former two I veer;
Now for HAMLET, now for LEAR:
Others, differing, may own a
Preference for sweet DESDEMONA;
Yet, in deeds of dread and death,
All must yield to grim MACBETH.

T. G.

FINIS.

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